

This is an Accepted Manuscript of an article published by Taylor & Francis Group in Culture, Theory and Critique on 08 May 2015, available online:

<http://www.tandfonline.com/10.1080/14735784.2015.1012684>.

Author Biography: Peter Baker obtained his PhD in Hispanic Studies from Texas A&M University in August 2015. His doctoral thesis, entitled “In the Shadows of Politics: Emergent Indigeneity in Bolivia 1970 – 2000,” studies the recent politicization of indigenous peoples in the Bolivian public sphere, and its challenges for the heritage of Western thought from the perspective of Critical Theory. His work is primarily in the area of Latin American Postcolonial and Cultural Studies, and he has also contributed two entries for the Encyclopaedia of Postcolonial Studies published by Blackwell’s and numerous entries for the Encyclopaedia of Modernism published by Routledge.

Can the State Learn to Live Well? Álvaro García Linera as an Intellectual of the State and Interpreter of History

Abstract: The rise of Morales and his Movement Toward Socialism in Bolivia in 2006 forms part of a general left-turn in Latin America in which, in the Andes in particular, the resurgence of political claims based on the right to indigeneity in the public national sphere has been an important element. As I argue, the political project of ‘refounding’ the State that the Morales administration has carried out, culminating in a change of constitution in 2009, has adopted an internal tension between national-popular and popular-indigenous elements. This essay analyses the ways in which the current Vice President of Bolivia and public intellectual Álvaro García Linera deals with this tension in his writings on the State. The argument will explore how his writing fails to escape a certain logic that reproduces a classical model of sovereignty, in which it

becomes García Linera's role as an intellectual of the State to interpret Bolivian history and develop political proposals with this historical interpretation as its base.

Someone, you or me, comes forward and says: *I would like to learn how to live finally*. (Derrida 1994: xvi, author's emphasis)¹

With this enigmatic syntagma, Jacques Derrida opened a lecture on the legacy of Karl Marx and *The Communist Manifesto* that was given in two parts on 22 and 23 April 1993 at the University of California, Riverside. It would later be revised and published under the title *The Specters of Marx*. The question of life is placed at the centre of what it means to reconsider the legacy of Marx after the fall of the Berlin Wall and the end of 'real socialism', a question of life as that which exceeds every calculative-representative logic, of life as being for death, as a living *with*, but above all of a life whose spectres render it not a *merely present* life, but the promise of a future life that can (yet) be otherwise. It is also thus the question of a spectre, the spectre of Marx and of Marxism, whose presence is still felt, indeed, who still unexpectedly pays us visits, even after Marxism has, *finally*, been defeated, and the triumph of global liberal capitalism is celebrated. The question of learning to live is then, for Derrida, about a certain Marxism that is still to come, or perhaps still to return. The '*finally*' of '*I would like to learn how to live, finally*' would be the return of a Marxist horizon still capable of putting a spanner in the works of a capitalist machine whose progress appears ineluctable.

It is perhaps worth wondering if, having known the present case of Bolivia, Derrida would not have reformulated his refrain in the following manner: 'I would like to learn how to

¹ The original quote in French reads: 'J'aimerais apprendre à vivre en fin'. The verb *apprendre* contains an intentional ambiguity, whose usual meaning is to learn, but can also mean to teach. Derrida questions thus not only what it would mean to learn to live, but also what it would mean to claim to be able to teach another how to live or, even, on what grounds one could make the claim that the other has not yet truly learnt how to live.

live *well*, finally'. The concept of the *Buen Vivir* [living well or the good life] forms part of a philosophical vision which has gained a great deal of political currency in recent years in the Andes region. It was incorporated into the new Ecuadorian constitution in 2008 and the new Bolivian constitution in 2009, and is widely discussed in academic and popular media circles in both countries. This is partly a result of a certain claim by which the *Buen Vivir* becomes the bearer of a number of cosmovisions whose roots are identified with indigenous-communitarian forms of living and is, therefore, strongly associated with the so-called 'emergent indigeneity' that has been taking place in Andean politics over the last few decades. Emergent indigeneity can be defined in an approximate manner as the increased visibility of political claims based on the right to being indigenous – however this is defined – in the national public sphere.² It represents the return of a spectre proper to the (post-)colonial history of the Latin American continent – that of the originary peoples themselves – but coincides with the return of another spectre, of a tradition of the Latin American left whose last bulwark, in Cuba, had already lost appeal in intellectual terms by the time of the Sandinistas' electoral defeat in Nicaragua in 1991. Are we today – *finally* – witnessing the emergence of a new left-wing alternative on the continent, and the recognition of indigenous populations that have been excluded from political processes for the past five centuries?

Bolivia is one of the Latin American countries in which this left turn or so-called 'pink tide' appears to have had remarkable success in establishing long-lasting government reforms that are widely regarded as legitimate, as is reflected by the continued popularity of the current MAS (Movement Toward Socialism) government, and the relative social stability of recent years. Following the unprecedented electoral victory of President Evo Morales and his 'co-pilot'

² Refer to Marisol de la Cadena (2010) for a more precise discussion.

Vice President Álvaro García Linera in 2006, the project of the MAS government has been no less than the ‘refoundation’ of the State. This has included Constitutional reforms that were finally passed in 2009, making Bolivia officially the ‘Plurinational State of Bolivia’. It is a project that is clearly understood in left-wing terms, as a challenge to the neoliberal administrations that came before it and often operates on a national-popular register. At the same time, this project of refoundation can also be regarded as a response to the popular-indigenous claims which eventually led, following a series of revolutionary insurrections between 2000 and 2005, to the election of Morales himself. As I observe in more detail below, then, the discourse of the MAS, insofar as it concerns a new State project, adopts an internal tension. This tension takes the form of a double bind or double obligation that has conditioned the narrative surrounding the so-called process of change (*proceso de cambio*) in Bolivia. It is a double obligation because it is caught between two demands that are mutually exclusive of one another. On the one hand, the project of the MAS seeks to construct a new, broad-base, national-popular hegemony. On the other hand, however, this construction seeks to be faithful to a revolutionary moment which had been conceived as a war between different civilizational models or nations: the communitarian indigenous and the capitalist *criollo-mestizo* nation.

Our interest here is to analyse how García Linera, as intellectual and interpreter of the recent historical events in Bolivia, responds *to* and *before* this double bind in his writings on the state. In particular, attention will be given to two texts written just before he is elected to the position of Vice President of Bolivia (both essays are originally published in 2004): ‘Indigenous Autonomies and Multinational State’ (2008a) and ‘State Crisis and Indigenous-Plebeian Mutiny in Bolivia’ (2008b).³ What I would like to draw attention to is the way in which this political

³ All translations, unless stated otherwise in the bibliography, are the author’s own.

figure, by positioning himself in a very particular way through his writing as an intellectual, observer, interpreter and politician – that is, as a member of the urban lettered elite – is capable of endowing himself with an exceptional place of legitimacy from which he becomes able to interpret Bolivian history and, with this interpretation as his starting point, intervene in it politically. It should be clear that this exceptional sphere of intellectuality also implies a question of political sovereignty. To this extent, the project of the new State in García Linera's theoretical model – arguably a variation on the current model of the MAS government – does not sufficiently engage with the problem of State sovereignty, even if it supposes to redistribute the power structure of State decision-making procedures among popular-indigenous sectors. On the contrary, rather than dividing or suspending it, this sovereignty is simply re-articulated under a new structure. The State becomes therefore the transcendent principle that is able to redirect the destiny of the nation in accordance with a new sense of historical normativity, which it becomes the task of the intellectual to prescribe.

Bolivia: One state, two nations

The above mention of the *Buen Vivir* in the Bolivian public sphere is not merely anecdotal or rhetorical, but it also presents us with a central tension which has defined the Bolivian political process in the twenty-first century. As Víctor Bretón Solo de Zaldívar (2013) has indicated, even if the concept of 'living well' or a 'good life' draws explicitly on an Aristotelian tradition of philosophy, it nevertheless represents a formally critical discursive construction that challenges neoclassical economic theory and conventional developmentalism (80). What is key here is that, even if this same author suggests that the concept of the *Buen Vivir* is 'firmly set upon a western *episteme*' (Bretón Solo de Zaldívar 2013: 80, author's emphasis), it claims to open up to an 'intercultural dialogue of knowledges' (Bretón Solo de Zaldívar 2013:

80) by incorporating a number of supposedly indigenous cosmovisions. Eduardo Gudynas and Alberto Acosta (2011) have analysed the *Buen Vivir* in terms of a catch-all concept, which is capable of articulating an alternative notion of life that turns upon a multiplicity of indigenous cosmovisions, such as a specifically Andean structure of economy based on reciprocity and Guarani mythology. In their own words: ‘*el Buen Vivir*, from its plurality, represents explorations which go beyond the ideas of development proper to Modernity’ (Gudynas and Acosta 2011: 81). The concept has been given particular political weight in Bolivia by David Choquehuanca, foreign minister since 2006, who contrasts the *Vivir Bien* or ‘living well’ to the capitalist strive for constant progress, what he calls *Vivir Mejor* (‘living better’).⁴

The *Buen Vivir* also presents, therefore, a dualistic vision of society, by putting forward that Bolivia is neither one society nor many societies, but two – one indigenous-communitarian, the other *mestizo*-white-capitalist. In this sense, the notion of *Buen Vivir* can be firmly placed in a certain tradition in which the division of Bolivian history into two parts would represent a way of reinscribing ‘indigenous difference’ within the historical narrative of the nation’s *devenir*. This reconsideration of traditional Bolivian historiography is what has been called the reinvention of the Indian, a phenomenon which has been on the rise since the late 1960s in Bolivia, promoted by the discourse of *katarismo*, a political group which sought to reclaim the word ‘Indian’ from its pejorative roots. It was Fausto Reinaga, author of *The Indian Revolution* in 1969 and creator of the very term Indianism, who first put forward the notion that there were two Bolivian nations existing contemporaneously within the same time and space. According to this author, these two faces of Bolivian history were irreconcilable, and the only possible road to

⁴ See, for example, the press release by the Bolivian Foreign Relations Ministry in Spain regarding a conference that Choquehuanca gave on the topic in April 2013 (‘El vivir bien como filosofía del proceso de cambio’, 2013).

salvation for the Indian could be found in the Indian Revolution, the complete replacement of the white-*mestizo* order for an Indian civilisation. Indeed, as a certain current of *katarismo* advocated, this dualistic vision of history made it possible to see Bolivia ‘with both eyes’, that is, not only from the ethnocentric monocular tradition of an orthodox Marxism which was the main object of criticism for the early *kataristas*.⁵ It implied a new way of seeing, a rupture that made visible what was previous invisible, revealing what had previously been veiled. To use the political-aesthetic terminology of philosopher Jacques Rancière, it represented a re-distribution of the sensible at the heart of the Bolivian political tradition.⁶

This new mode of reading Bolivian history turned on a double historical horizon. On the one hand, it presented a new interpretation of the past from the perspective of the exclusion of the indigenous from Bolivia’s Republican tradition. As Rivera Cusicanqui (1987) claims, this historical ‘recuperation’ adopted two horizons of indigenous memory – a distant memory of the colonial experience which continued to determine the exclusion of indigenous life from Bolivian politics, and a recent memory of the promises and failures of the 1952 Revolution, particularly of how indigenous difference came to be erased after the Revolution by a fraternal Marxist language of the revolutionary State, which replaced the term ‘Indian’ with ‘peasant’. On the other hand, this new discourse also constituted its historical subject – the Indian – as a projection or trajectory, on the path towards a messianic future, an emancipatory horizon for the indigenous peoples.

⁵ For a more detailed account of this version of *katarismo* which explores the possible aesthetic readings of the notion of ‘seeing with both eyes’, refer to Sanjinés (2004).

⁶ With the ‘distribution of the sensible’, Jacques Rancière means to designate the economy of any aesthetic regime. It should be understood that, for Rancière, the aesthetic is not merely a question of art but of how perception and the production of meaning co-determine one another, defining what is and what is not visible within a given common space. For more details, refer to Rancière (2006).

This is the legacy of indigenous-popular civil movements that was inherited by the Morales government in 2006. The unprecedented electoral majority that brought Morales to power made him the third President of Bolivia in three years, following the resignation of two neoliberal presidents during a series of indigenous-popular uprisings. His election to some extent represented therefore the promise of indigenous emancipation, in the sense understood by Indianist discourse above. At the same time, however, the elections were regarded by many others in Bolivia as the promise to restore order without needing to resort to force after more than five years of revolutionary insurrection. In other words, for these sectors of society, it was a question of how to restore some level of national unity.

The complexity of this double register, oscillating between the national-popular and popular-indigenous, could be felt in the double inauguration of Evo Morales in January of 2006. The first inauguration took place on 21 January in Tiwanaku, a pre-Incan site, as part of a popular ceremony in which Morales walked over coca leaves (considered sacred in many Andean indigenous cultures), was blessed by Andean religious leaders and recognised as Apumallku, an indigenous leader. The second inauguration, the official State inauguration, took place the following day in La Paz, where the new President announced a cultural democratic revolution, conjuring the popular images of struggles by national idols as diverse as Tupac Katari, Simón Bolívar and Che Guevara, after five hundred years of resistance from indigenous, black and popular sectors (Postero 2007). In these two events, Morales articulates a historical conscience of injustice from a register which clearly pertains to the Indianist tradition I have outlined here. Nevertheless, he does not fail to maintain a national-popular discourse, in which the downtrodden classes of Bolivian history are understood to be popular sectors in a general sense, not only those which have descended from indigenous communities. One cannot help but

think of Morales's double inauguration, then, as his ascendancy to Presidency in not one, but two nations - the two Bolivias. It is symbolic of a unification of two nations inhabiting the same geopolitical area that have been irreconcilably divided since the Conquest – at least according to certain Indianist claims. In Morales's double inauguration, what is perceived is a negotiation at the intersection of a number of political and popular discourses, between the national-popular and the popular-indigenous, which intervene and interconnect on a new political plane.

In the election of Morales, therefore, the demand for a deepening of democratic structures in Bolivia adopted an aporetic structure. On the one hand, the new government administration had a clear national and conciliatory-nationalist horizon. On the other hand, it continued – at least rhetorically – to be faithful to the revolutionary movement that brought it to power, envisaged as the long-awaited victory of a communitarian-indigenous bloc over their white-*mestizo*-capitalist oppressors. Many observers within the country have noted such a tension. Stefanoni (2011) spoke of the problematic of 'two illusions' competing simultaneously in the country, one 'developmentalist' and the other 'communitarian'. Svampa (2009) noted that 'the ideology of Evo Morales articulates a double dimension' (59) in which 'we have the case of an intertwining between a communitarian project, still in process, conceived of as a project and a horizon, and of a national-popular path, as a means of conceiving and doing politics, with all of its regulating, centralist and verticalist dimensions' (2009: 60).

The discourse of the MAS thus finds itself caught in a kind of double bind or double obligation. On the one hand, their discourse responds to a demand to bring to an end the unjust oppression of the subaltern sectors of society, those who have been marginalised *from* and *by* history (in which the indigenous have a privileged, but not exclusive place). This demand adopts a universal character in the name of a – necessarily incalculable – justice. On the other hand,

however, this demand has, as its condition of possibility, the particularities which meet at the intersection of the conflicting narratives of the two Bolivias: firstly, a national-popular legacy which remits to the revolutionary project of '52, and, secondly, the emergence of an Indianism which rejects the latter for its exclusion of the indigenous question. This second 'Bolivia' would, of course, include all the particularities of indigeneity as it is conceived in and by these Indianist discourses, with its indigenous histories, politics, cultures, ethnicities and ways of life. The project of the Morales government, then, could be understood as an attempt to create a State structure that was capable of providing relief to the tension of this double obligation.

Can the State learn to live well?

If we have taken an extended contextual detour in order to indicate the conditions of a double bind or double obligation at the heart of the MAS's State project, it is because this problematic is not alien to the author who concerns us here. It is well known that the current Vice President of Bolivia participated in the Tupac Katari Guerrilla Army (EGTK) throughout the late 1980s and early 1990s. The EGTK was founded by none other than the Aymara nationalist Felipe Quispe, an activist who was heavily engaged with the Indianist revival and with the writings of Fausto Reinaga in particular. It is perhaps not surprising that García Linera's seminal work, *Value Form, Community Form* (1995), written while he was in a maximum security prison for his involvement with the Guerrilla movement, is clearly influenced by his experience with Aymara resistance, as a work in which he proposes the universalisation of the *ayllu* (an indigenous form of community) as a political horizon capable of replacing mercantile capitalist societal forms. After being released without trial in the late 1990s, and with other members of the so-called *Comuna* intellectual group, García Linera became a kind of Marxist chronicler and interpreter of the Bolivian *Zeitgeist*, co-writing volumes on indigenous and

popular social movements at the moment of most intense social dissidence within Bolivia. He is very familiar with the debates that have formed and shaped Indianist discourse, and explicitly recognises his own work as part of a resurgence of a critical Marxism at the turn of the century in Bolivia, which found itself in the interstices of debates on Marxism and Indianism (see García Linera 2008d). Indeed, García Linera's own Marxist thought can be interpreted as an attempt to provide a Marxist account of Indianism, or a language that is compatible with both of these traditions. Both an established academic and respected activist, his position within the Bolivian lettered elite would appear to give him particular legitimacy as an interpreter and spokesperson of the downtrodden classes.

García Linera's essay, 'Indigenous Autonomy and Multinational State' (2008a), published originally in 2004, and thus only two years before he would eventually be elected as Vice President of Bolivia, draws on his previous work on popular-indigenous movements in order to propose a possible reconfiguration of the Bolivian State.⁷ It is interesting to note that the author rejects in this essay not only, predictably, the neoliberal State model, but also, perhaps more surprisingly, a State model based on indigenous national autonomy projects such as those being carried out by certain Aymara groups during the years that he was writing. Given his vociferous sympathy for Indianist liberation projects, one might imagine that García Linera would have been likely to consider this second possibility more seriously. Instead, he proposes the designing of a new State structure that would be capable of allocating the distribution of powers and normativity appropriate to the 'ethnic-cultural diversity' and the 'civilisational plurality' of Bolivia. What he is writing about here is a State project which would be accountable to the plurality of the indigenous-popular sectors within Bolivia that were mobilising at that time

⁷ See *La descentralización que viene*. ed. Álvaro García Linera et al. La Paz: ILDiS-Plural (2004).

around questions of increased autonomy and State recognition without, for all that, renouncing to the possibility of a national-popular base that extends beyond those same sectors. In other words, this author places this new State project very explicitly within the double bind outlined above. His proposal for a new State structure can be read, indeed, as an attempt to unravel the double-bind at the heart of the Bolivian revolutionary project, oscillating between the national-popular and the popular-indigenous. His proposal also coincides with what will be the eventual project of the MAS government itself.

At a very basic level, his proposal is for the design of a new State structure which adopts what we might call a more organic integration with the *motely* character of Bolivian society – that is, the simultaneous existence of different social, economic and political forms under one nation.⁸ It is a proposal that departs from a very precise critique of the neoliberal patrimonial State apparatus in place at the time of his writing. The kernel of this critique resides in his accusation that the current neoliberal State, by not being sufficiently organically integrated with Bolivia's *motely* society, is only able to preside over that society as an overdetermination of its diverse social forms, and therefore as a form of domination. On the one hand, he claims, the State refuses to recognise alternative cultural forms that exist within the country as legitimate political articulations at the national level. In other words, despite that Bolivia itself is a 'co-existence of various overlapping or moderately articulated regional nationalities or cultures' (García Linera 2008a: 225), the State is nevertheless 'monolingual and monocultural in terms of Bolivian Spanish-speaking cultural identity' (García Linera 2008a: 226). On the other hand,

⁸ Motely is the most common translation of Marxist sociologist René Zavaleta Mercado's theorisation of Bolivian social structure as a *sociedad abigarrada*. Refer to Zavaleta Mercado (1986). The expression has been adopted by members of the *Comuna* group, in which García Linera once participated, to navigate the problematic blurring of class and ethnic lines in Bolivian historical accounts. As such, it has become for García Linera an important theoretical tool for managing the double bind between Bolivia's 'two nations.'

García Linera accuses the state of privileging the dominant capitalist form of civilisation over all others, making the claim that Bolivia is ‘multicivilisational’. With the term ‘multicivilisational’, García Linera draws upon the work of one of the other members of the former intellectual group *Comuna*, Luis Tapia, who uses the term civilisation to refer to the different modes of production that exist simultaneously within contemporary Bolivia (Tapia 2002). Thus, writes García Linera, while two-thirds of the Bolivian economy is not of a modern mercantile-industrial type, but rather follows a guild, corporative, collective or what is called simply ‘Amazonian’ logic (2008a, 232–235), the State constitutes itself exclusively on the basis of this first type of economy. In other words, while the neoliberal State logic follows political habits and techniques appropriate to a certain kind of civilisational order (that of mercantile capitalism), this is not so for most of those who inhabit the national territory, thereby excluding them *de facto* from national participatory politics.

García Linera thus proposes a new State structure which is *both multinational and multicivilisational*, that is, one which is able to account for the two dimensions of Bolivian political life that are not recognised as such by the current neoliberal State. In speaking of the first dimension, the multinational State, what is really at stake for García Linera is challenging a notion of citizenship based on supposedly universal grounds, given that this would always already be founded, he affirms, on a necessarily ethnocentric perspective (2008a: 247). This claim turns on a reduction of the political *demos* to the *ethnos* that sustains it, wherein, in each and every case, every *demos* is always already an *ethnos* and, therefore, the promotion of a universal citizenship (‘*demos*’) is nothing other than the reproduction of the ethnocentric monocultural State that the author seeks to criticise. What would be necessary, instead, would be to ‘take on processes of asymmetrical and differentiated recognition of national and ethnic identities on a

macro and regional scale' (García Linera 2008a: 249), in which one could achieve 'political unity of a differential society, that is to say, one that has communities that are national and others that are not' (ibid). This would include granting a certain level of autonomy to those national or ethnic communities he mentions, on the one hand, while also fostering the possibility that these communities are represented in the State apparatus itself, on the other.

The kernel of the second dimension, which García Linera calls the multicivilisational State, resides in the understanding that there are many forms of democratic practices which currently operate in Bolivian society and which have a direct relationship with the diverse types of economic systems that exist, or to use a language which reflects more closely that of the author, which conform to the political habits and techniques of their objective mode of production. The author develops upon critical reflections that represent some of the strongest contributions of his work, understanding modes of political participation as co-determinants of the conditions of production that lie at their base. García Linera thus accuses the State form that Bolivia has historically known of undermining the political practices of subaltern groups in favour of a representational liberal democracy that privileges only those members of society who conform to the logic of the mercantile economy. The task of the multicivilisational State, therefore, would be to account for these alternative practices by granting them a legitimate decision-making capacity in the drafting of public policies which have an impact in the national arena. In his own words:

Due to the qualities of its historical formation, the complex social reality of Bolivia has produced various techniques of political democratic behaviour, and an effective democratic State would be required to recognise on a large scale, in the sphere of fundamental decision making of public policies, the institutionalised legitimacy of the different ways of practicing and understanding democracy. (García Linera 2008a: 265)

García Linera's writings on the multinational and multicivilisational State represent an important contribution to ongoing reflections on the topic from a marginalised group of political activists and writers who were daring enough to imagine Bolivia otherwise during a moment of great political conservatism. He represents an intellectual who worked within the horizon of an indigenous-popular movement while nevertheless refusing to privilege the particularities of that movement over other social forms that co-habited the nation. Indeed, by articulating the possibility of a unified state apparatus that is multinational and multicivilizational, what García Linera offers is a way of bridging the two incompatible registers of the popular demands that lay behind the election of the MAS government in 2006. The indigenous claims to national autonomy are no longer incompatible with a national-popular discourse, in which the 'socialism to come' and 'Andean and Amazonian capitalism', important articulations of the MAS project which have come from García Linera since 2006, is presided over by the single 'pluri' nation-state (which is the name adopted by the new Bolivian Constitution, in recognition of the nation's diverse ethnic and linguistic composition).

However, there is a tension here between the projection of Bolivia as a multinational State, and the role of the single state apparatus that comes to preside over these multiple nations. By placing himself in the role of chronicler and interpreter of the Bolivian *Zeitgeist*, in which he is capable of explaining the insurrectionary moment of 2000–2005 through recourse to a certain way of understanding Bolivia in all its civilisational plurality or *motley* sociality, García Linera offers himself in this essay as the intellectual figure able to prescribe modifications or 'corrections' to the State apparatus, an apparatus which would eventually be capable therefore of

‘representing’ the structure of that plurality.⁹ What I want to draw attention to here is not the question of whether or not García Linera’s diagnosis of Bolivia’s *motley* society can promote a better understanding of how certain forms of exploitation have historically taken place in that country, but rather how the author reproduces a certain relationship between knowledge production and the subaltern in his writings in which it is the role of the intellectual to translate the needs of the underrepresented. As such, it is the intellectual who retains the right to speak for the *motley* character of the multination, to know better, to *teach how to live well*, thereby conjuring the ghostly echo of a sovereign voice thought to have been exorcised from the body politic. García Linera positions himself through his writing as a figure of authority, as the one capable of consolidating the multiple histories of an indigenous-popular Bolivia into a single project, writing the (multi-)nation as a new imagined community. He places himself in a privileged position for reconciling the double bind at the heart of the Bolivian revolutionary moment.

Meanwhile, the question of sovereignty in the multinational State is never truly addressed in the text. Although the author explicitly advocates a State apparatus of a multi-demotic composition (against a ‘universal citizenship’, as described above), the question of who or what holds the final decisions regarding the transformation of the State in the building of so-called indigenous-popular hegemony is suspended in his writing, postponed for another moment. What is nevertheless detectable in the writings of those years is a certain hesitation between a theorisation of the multiplicity of social forms based on historically contingent objective conditions, and a certain sense of historical normativity that would indicate the necessary

⁹ I use ‘correction’ throughout this article as a translation of ‘reconducción’, the word that the Morales administration adopted to make reference to the constitutional reforms.

direction of a new political practice. In another essay on the state published in the same year, ‘State Crisis and Indigenous-Plebeian Mutiny in Bolivia’ (2008b), for example, García Linera suggests that the State crisis of those revolutionary years did not bring into question the notion of progress or development *per se*, but was rather a consequence of bad progress or bad development, which would appear to reinstate a certain investment in developmentalism and modernity.¹⁰ He affirms: ‘the generalised institutionality of indigenous and plebeian social movements ... question the validity of a Republican state institutionality that feigns modernity in a society that lacks, *and is still deprived*, of the structural and material bases of this imagined modernity’ (García Linera 2008b: 340, my emphasis). Particularly revealing in this text is that, for the author, the State crisis that was taking place at the time of his writing was not to be understood as a possible opening to alternative forms of governance that quite simply refused the State as a legitimate political body, but rather to a – necessary – reformulation and re-stabilisation of the State. In his own words: ‘With all this, it is well known that state crises cannot last long because there is no society that can withstand long periods of incertitude and emptiness of political articulation’ (García Linera 2008b: 343). With the inevitability of the state structure, then, the author is forced to conclude that ‘the indigenous-plebeian pole *should* consolidate a hegemonic capacity... understanding this *as intellectual and moral leadership over the social majorities of the country*’ (García Linera 2008b: 349, my emphasis).

The question here is not whether the state form should or should not be the platform for any meaningful process of revolutionary change in Bolivia today. It is rather about a certain question concerning the complicity between politics and the role of public intellectuals, which no

¹⁰ For the original publication, see *Memorias de Octubre*. ed. Álvaro García Linera et al. La Paz: Comuna/Muela del Diablo (2004).

single person in Latin America today, perhaps, better represents than García Linera. By speaking on behalf of what the indigenous-plebeian *should* do in their capacity of *intellectual and moral leadership*, what is at stake is a new ethical-normative principle that sovereignly declares itself above the social majority. It is exceptional, in so far as it extracts or immunizes itself from the process of history in order to direct and ‘correct’ it, in the name of a historical justice which transcends the conditions of any localised conflict. What is more, by speaking on behalf of this process, as the interpreter of the *motely* Bolivian social body *par excellence*, it is the state and its intellectual elite (of which García Linera comes to represent the highest but not only representative) that legitimates itself to represent that intellectual and moral leadership. The question would no longer be, then, of whether the state can ‘learn to live well, *finally*’ but, having already learnt its lessons from history, whether it can ‘*teach* to live well, *finally*’ – and what happens to those students who never seem to learn. From this perspective, the multinational or multicivilisational State model in García Linera’s writing does not seek to divide or suspend the political sovereignty of the State (by granting, for example, autonomous decision-making power of indigenous communities over the use of land), but rather to reinstate this sovereignty under a new guise.

Conclusion: Point of bifurcation

Writing in 2008, amidst difficult negotiations concerning the Bolivian constitutional reforms, García Linera’s text ‘State in Transition. Power Bloc and Point of Bifurcation’ (2008c) was published in an unfinished form. Continuing to emphasise the inevitability of the State form, the author characterizes the history of the State as a repeated cycle of crisis and reconstitution. In this essay, García Linera argues that the current Bolivian State should be considered a ‘State in Transition’, one that, having lived through a moment of crisis during the insurrections of 2000–

2005, finds itself in a moment of reconstitution that has not yet been consolidated. Taking place in a moment that constitutes a radical transformation of class conditions for the author, what is indeed certain is that the process of transition has brought about new blocs of power that are changing the configuration of the State itself. Nevertheless, and despite this, ‘the battle for the lasting ideological direction of society is not resolved’ (García Linera 2008c: 409). What the State is still waiting to experience is its ‘point of bifurcation’, understood as a ‘point of conversion from the disorder of the system into the order and stabilisation of that same system’ (García Linera 2008c: 410). It is a moment in which this new order, the new power bloc, comes to a head with other potentially hegemonic blocs and there is a closure of the open-ended process that the State crisis represents. García Linera finishes with this premonitory passage:

Initially we had believed that the construction of the State was possible through mechanisms of dialogue and pacts and, actually, we still believe in and support this option, the idea of reaching a point of bifurcation of a democratic character, by successive approximations. But the logics of reason and history make us think, rather, that increasingly we will eventually reach something more like a moment of a tensioning of forces, the point of bifurcation, and we will have to see what happens. I think that in the case of Bolivia, this moment is closer than it seems. But in any case, the point of bifurcation and its qualities are going to define the personality and the qualities of the new State in the future. (2008c: 412)

The essay was published in its final form two years later, in which García Linera supplements the text with a certain ‘working hypothesis’. According to the author, in the months of August–October 2008, Bolivia would have experienced its point of bifurcation, the events that would bring an end the moment of State transition, consolidating ‘the new structure of State correlation of forces, which were furthermore made visible in the general election results of December 2009’ (García Linera 2010: 35). He is writing of a moment which was decisive for the passing of the Constitutional Reforms, when the more right-leaning so-called ‘half-moon’ region in the east of Bolivia lost the upper hand in its attempt to stall and limit the MAS’s constitutional

proposals (not without first, however, forcing the Morales administration to accept important modifications) and the Constitution was finally passed. The full details of the moment are not important here, what is more critical is the way in which this moment is explicitly celebrated in the text as an achievement for the ‘indigenous-popular government’ over the right-wing opposition, closing a moment of crisis and opening to a new order which does not belong to the old elite, but is faithful to alternative nations and ethnicities, historically closing, perhaps, the previous irreconcilable conflict between the two Bolivian nations. In the text, the moment appears as the inauguration of a new age, one of indigenous-popular hegemony that repairs hundreds of years of colonial injustice.

One must wonder, however, if what is identified here as a point of bifurcation does not mask another point of bifurcation that curtailed the open, one could say, post-hegemonic process opened by the State crisis that García Linera describes. I refer here, of course, to the recent TIPNIS affair (August–October 2011), in which plans for building a highway through the Isiboro Sécore National Park and Indigenous Territory were carried out without prior consultation with many of the groups that it most affected. When an alliance of indigenous organizations protested by marching on La Paz, as they had done many times in the past under neoliberal administrations to make claims from those governments, they were stopped en route and brutally repressed by government authorities. The events resulted in the weakening of the indigenous-popular social movements and the dissolution of the *Comuna* intellectual group, many of whose former members have since been fierce critics of the Morales administration and of García Linera in particular as an esteemed intellectual figure within it.

How are we to interpret this conflict? As García Linera affirms in his writings on the point of bifurcation, in the aftermath of State consolidation there continues to be conflict.

However, that conflict is no longer about ‘structural conflict,’ no longer confrontations over the general shape of the country (García Linera 2010: 39). Was the TIPNIS affair merely one of these post-crisis conflicts? Or should it rather be understood as the ‘real’ point of bifurcation that closed the process of State crisis – and, in this version of events, not in the favour of an indigenous-popular hegemony? In fact, either viewpoint – one belonging to an uncritical government mass, another belonging to an equally uncritical, perhaps, mass of resistance – is always already ideological from the standpoint of history. Adopting either perspective would be to reiterate the exceptional figure that the State represents in the re-writing of history that is currently being consolidated as part and parcel of the new Bolivian social pact (a process that is, I would argue, still being negotiated, but has been a great deal more overdetermined by official discourse in recent years). The current Vice-President of Bolivia, as intellectual of the State and interpreter of history, has written for himself an exceptional role within the new social order. The role of a critical intellectual practice should be to continue to bring attention to the ghostly return of a sovereign whose exile from the new revolutionary order was always already an internal exile, who was never altogether purged or exorcised. And whose return from the dead can still teach us, perhaps, new lessons on what it would mean to want to learn to live well.

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